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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TALLINN 000354

SIPDIS

FOR EUR FRONT OFFICE

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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: A/S FRIED VISITS TALLINN

Classified by: Ambassador Dave Phillips. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

REF: TALLINN 338

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During EUR A/S Dan Fried's October 1 visit to Tallinn, Estonian government and political leaders urged that NATO military commanders update NATO's Article 5 contingency planning in the wake of Russia's invasion of Georgia. Estonia's President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister all stressed that the international community must (1) avoid Russia's isolation from the West, while (2) at the same time emphasize that in the current circumstances it is impossible to conduct "business as usual" with Moscow. All three leaders also reaffirmed their strong support for the Membership Action Plan for Georgia and Ukraine, while aware of continued objections by other NATO members. Estonian leaders assured A/S Fried that domestic relations with the Russian-speaking community in Estonia continue to be friendly. On Iraq and Afghanistan, there was unwavering support for Estonia's participation in military operations, though Estonia laid down a marker that extension of the Iraq mandate will be based on a formal request from the Government of Iraq for Estonia to continue to participate. A/S Fried did extensive press; so far his visit has received straightforward coverage. END SUMMARY.

ESTONIA SECURE WITH ARTICLE V, BUT WANTS CONTINGENCY PLANS

¶2. (C) During his visit to Tallinn on October 1, EUR Assistant Secretary Dan Fried met Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, Foreign Minister Urmas Paet and several members of Parliament. In response to their interest, A/S Fried assured Ilves, Ansip and Paet that the U.S. supported a fresh look at contingency planning at NATO to update Article 5 scenarios. It was better, Fried added, to talk less (and posture not at all), but simply work to see that NATO does its routine work of updating its plans. Ilves, Ansip and Paet fully agreed with this approach -- particularly its lower-profile aspect, and noted that a public debate over NATO ideology or an abstract "Russian threat" would only complicate practical work and worry some Allies (Germany and France).

¶3. (C) PM Ansip and FM Paet assured A/S Fried that contrary to the pleas in the media (e.g., "Will anyone help us?"), the Government of Estonia (GOE) trusts its Article 5 guarantee. Paet indicated, however, that events in Georgia "stressed" Estonian society, and had revealed a desire for a more visible NATO presence in Estonia. Paet noted that Russian planes in Pskov were only 300 kms from Estonia while NATO planes in Lithuania were located 600 kms away.

Paet reported that Estonia was reconstructing the Amari military airfield (near Tartu) and suggested NATO planes could land there "as part of a permanent air policing mission in Estonia." A/S Fried encouraged the Estonians to engage Ambassador Volker at NATO on this issue.

IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN: ESTONIA WANTS TO STAY

¶ 14. (C) FM Paet expressed Estonia's pride at being among the five countries asked to remain in Iraq in 2009, and confirmed that Estonia is ready to continue. "The mission," he said, "is not over yet, the job is not done." At the same time, however, Paet said the GOE needed urgently to receive a formal request from the Gov't of Iraq to remain in the coalition; this letter would serve as part of Estonia's legal basis to continue the mission. Until this letter arrived, the GOE could not present its request to extend the mandate to Parliament for its review and approval. While Paet also cautioned that there was much confusion over the future SOFA arrangements for coalition partners, the urgency was clearly in the request from the Iraqis. (NOTE: A/S Fried instructed DCM to convey urgency to S/I Satterfield in Baghdad. Ambassador conveyed response to FM Paet on Oct 2. END NOTE.)

¶ 15. (C) Both FM Paet and PM Ansip expressed interest in finding ways for Estonian troops to continue to work side-by-side with American troops after the Iraq mission ended. Both leaders prioritized the experience gained in these joint operations for Estonian forces.

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GEORGIA AND UKRAINE: CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR MAP

¶ 16. (C) A/S Fried confirmed U.S. support MAP for Georgia and Ukraine, although he recognized popular support for MAP in Ukraine remained uncertain, and dissent among the Allies over the readiness of Georgia further marred Tbilisi's chances. Ansip and Paet agreed with A/S Fried's assessment that the Europeans and the U.S. together had to find a realistic way to keep MAP on track, while at the same time not allowing Russia to feel they had a veto in NATO.

¶ 17. (C) Discussion with President Ilves concerning Georgia centered on the need to deprive Russia of strategic gains, now that its initial goal of overthrowing the Saakashvili government had been thwarted. While expressing his unwavering support for Georgia, Ilves was blunt about his frustration with President Mikhail Saakashvili. "He didn't listen to us, he didn't listen to anybody" (about moving forces into South Ossetia on August 7-8). "I took a lot of flack for going there" (in the days after the invasion) Ilves grumbled, "I called him up and told him to stop talking about Estonia being next." Ilves also mentioned a white paper by the UK Foreign Office calling for a return to "business as usual" with Russia, and he emphasized that the GOE opposed this attitude. He complained that the EU was "complicit" in a gradual return to business as usual (such as President Sarkozy's suggestion that Russia be discussed in the context of the G8, and continuing a visa dialogue with Russia in the EU's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement). Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan and others should get a visa agreement under the PCA, Ilves said, and Russia should get sanctions by the West applying anti-money laundering (AML) statutes to them.

VISA WAIVER, GRAY PASSPORTS, AND ETHNIC RUSSIANS

¶ 18. (C) Relations with Russia also colored discussions related to Estonia's pending accession to the U.S. Visa Waiver Program (VWP). PM Ansip pointed out that not only is VWP an important issue for Estonian citizens, it will be important in addressing the situation of so-called 'gray passport' holders residing in Estonia. Ansip viewed VWP as a valuable tool for encouraging the 100,000 or so remaining

gray passport holders to acquire Estonian citizenship. (NOTE: Currently, gray passport holders can travel throughout Schengen and to Russia without a visa. However, under VWP, they will not qualify for visa-free travel to the United States. END NOTE). Fried agreed with the program's potential to entice gray passport holders to seek Estonian citizenship. Even President Ilves confessed that while attending a recent ceremony for 60 new Estonian citizens he thought (but refrained from saying) that the only true benefit these new Estonians were getting was visa-free access to the United States.

¶9. (C) Asked about rumors in recent weeks about separatists in Narva declaring independence, or the Russian embassy handing out passports to thousands of ethnic Russians in northeast Estonia, President Ilves and PM Ansip dismissed them as old-school Russian disinformation. They attributed such stories to the same group of activists, the so-called 'Nightwatch,' directed by Moscow, who have been linked to the 2007 Bronze Soldier demonstrations. As for the Estonian press reaching out to the Russian community in the country, President Ilves said the local media is not "pro-anything", it is simply objective. He acknowledged that Russian-language content here is like "Estonian PBS" and even the Estonian-language TV cannot compete for Russian viewership like the programming they receive from Moscow.

MEDIA COVERAGE

¶10. (U) A/S Fried participated in both a foreign policy press roundtable and a television interview. Subsequent media coverage so far has been straightforward. Questions during the roundtable with foreign policy editors (from both Russian language and Estonian language print and electronic media) and representatives from foreign policy think tanks focused primarily on Russia. Fried was also interviewed by Estonian Television's (ETV) weekly foreign policy analysis program and a fifteen-minute interview is expected to air on October 6. The interview focused on

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Russia and Georgia, but primarily on how Russia's actions have impacted Russia and Russia-U.S. relations and how the EU and the U.S. view their current and future relationship with Russia. Additionally, there was some discussion of the Iraq and Afghanistan missions, the Visa Waiver Program and general economic issues.

¶11. (U) The TV3 evening news, with an estimated 156,000 viewers, focused on the Visa Waiver Program and Fried's comments that, although some members of Congress opposed the program, the Administration continues its work to bring Estonia into the Visa Waiver Program this year. Kalev TV (estimated 35,000 viewers) reported on Assistant Secretary Fried's meetings with President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Prime Minister Andrus Ansip, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Urmas Paet. The news program aired an interview with Paet who stated that sanctions against Russia should not take place and that the U.S. shares the Estonian view that similar actions of aggression in Georgia can not be repeated. Paet also stated that the continuation of the Estonian mission to Afghanistan and Iraq was one of the topics of discussion with A/S Fried while he was in Tallinn.

¶12. (U) In addition to the print and broadcast media coverage, articles covering A/S Fried's visit appeared in the online sites of print media outlets Postimees, Aripaev, and SL Ohtuleht. Due to the late hour of the press round table, additional coverage is expected in online media Oct 2-3.) Additional coverage is also expected on the weekly foreign affairs radio show on Kuku radio, a privately-owned news radio station, on Sunday, October 5. (NOTE: Post will provide a separate cable on media reaction. END NOTE.)

¶13. (U) A/S Fried cleared this cable.

PHILLIPS